



I. The Role of Parks and Recreation in El Paso's Bright Future

Since the inception of public parks in America over 100 years ago, the role, and value of public parks and its related services reflect the ongoing change and evolution of our nation and its times. In today's world with increased mobility for companies and people, parks, and recreation assumes a new and more critical role in the future of a community - that of "viability and livability".

The economic "viability" of a community is dependent upon an area's "livability" or how desirable a community is as a place for people to live, work, learn, and play. Today's knowledgeable workers are most interested in living in an area where there is appreciation for the natural environment along with easy access to those natural resources; planned and spontaneous social and entertainment opportunities play a close second. These preferences are not lost on the companies that seek to attract, employ, and retain the best and brightest knowledge workers.

Another aspect contributing to the economic viability of a community is the ability to attract and retain retirees. States in the southern region of the United States are currently involved in high stakes marketing campaign as they compete to bring retirees with the positive cash flow they

represent into the fold of their states and communities. Again, the role of public parks and recreation as providing quality of life opportunities is part of the competitive edge package.

The relationship between community viability and its livability extends into other areas as well. One such critical area for the future reflects the educational levels and overall health and well-being of a community's youth. The role that public parks and recreation can play in the informal learning and support for young people in a community is critical for enhancing the access to and successful completion of formal education.

The number of young adults in the United States who are "at risk" of not making a successful adult transition is a serious challenge to the viability of our nation's communities. When you couple this risk with school attendance and drop-out rates, the economic impact continues to grow.

The role that parks and recreation is playing currently in areas, neighborhoods, and for individuals across the country

designed to address the many challenges and opportunities, reflects the shift from parks and recreation's perception as an amenity or nice thing to have to an essential or necessity of today's world.

Current examples from the Federal and State Levels include such things as the financial support being provided

for development of trails as alternative methods of transportation, the reclamation of brownfields, and heavy

Therefore, the Master Plan recommends that the City of El Paso Parks and Recreation Department, in its quest for a Bright Future, reposition its role, programming, and services in a way that more closely reflects the concerns and issues of life in the early 21st century particularly as it relates to the unique needs of El Paso.

This shift most closely corresponds to the "From Amenity to Essential " approach that supports and enhances community viability and overall well-being of its residents.



emphasis upon access to parks and recreation programming as antidotes to obesity and health care costs.

Examples from Urban and Municipalities across the country include the large number of economic development projects in Southern states other than Florida to attract retirees as a source of continued economic impact. Many cities are attempting to reposition their access to natural and open spaces as well as entertainment and recreational options as a way to attract the “creative class” to their areas. In leading the nation, communities such as Phoenix and Indianapolis have repositioned the services of their departments to support important community issues such as youth and health. Clearly, park facilities and recreation programs are an asset that can help to create and contribute to a Bright Future for El Paso.

II The Evolving and Ever-Changing Roles of Public Parks and Recreation

A review of the evolving and ever-changing roles of public parks and recreation throughout its 100+ year history includes the following:

1. Early 1900s - Social Support for Community Well-being

Developed as a Response to Shift from Agricultural to Industrial Era of the United States coupled with increased Immigration

Program and Services:

- the beginning of playgrounds for children to overcome the dangers of playing in the streets with no adult supervision
- designation of open, green space as places for people to gather to counter-balance close living quarters.

2. Depression Era - Strong, Government Support

Developed as a response to the serious challenges and conditions associated with this time in our history

Programs and Services:

- Federal work programs such as the WPA and the Conservation Corp provided employment and dignity for Americans resulting in the construction of trails, parks, pools, gymnasiums, skating rinks, etc.

3. Post World War II - Boom Time Era:

Parks and Recreation Everywhere and for Everybody was in response to the post war prosperity, the baby boom, and birth of the suburbs.

Programs and Services:

- A myriad of leisure opportunities grew in all sectors of society including the birth of Little League, the opening of Disneyland, family vacations, country clubs, etc.

4. Onset of the 1980s - Pay for Play

This period reflected the passage of Proposition 13 in California that soon spread throughout the country

Programs and Services:

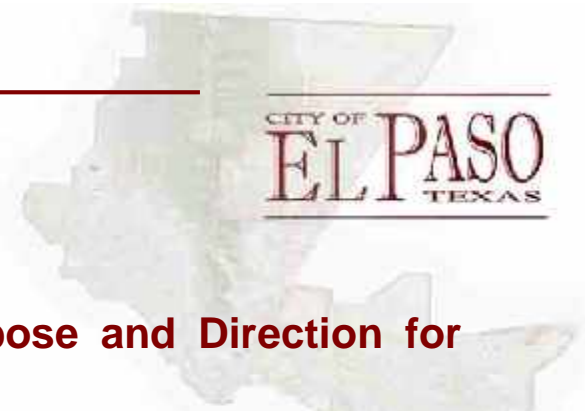
- A market-oriented approach consumed public parks and recreation as the actual survival of some departments and the perceived success of others related to the ability to generate revenue.

5. End of the 20th and Beginning of 21st Century - From Amenity to Essential

Government at all levels began to focus on how the basic services and amenities offered by parks and recreation contributed to the economic viability of communities and the health and well-being of its citizens.

Programs and Services:

- Adoption and/or adaptation of urbanism, livable communities, health and wellness movement, focus upon children and aging adults.



III. Recreation Programs and Services

Recreation programs and services serve a dual purpose in the life of a community. The array of such recreation and leisure offerings contributes to a perceived quality of life in an area while the delivery for such programs and services creates opportunities for people to grow, develop, and thrive as individuals and contributing members of the community.

The types of activities and programs provided by a department need to reflect the needs of the community while simultaneously supporting the overall viability of the community. This is especially true for a city such as El Paso that is a unique entity in its own right.

This section will encompass the following recommendations related to recreation programming:

- Overall Purpose and Directions for Recreation in El Paso
- Identification of a Continuum of Recreation Services
- Policy and Pricing Recommendations related to the Continuum

A set of additional recommendations will be made related to the best use of existing human resources to direct and support the recreation programming.

IV. Overall Purpose and Direction for Recreation

Recreation as a public service is responsible for contributing to the overall viability and well-being of that community by addressing issues and challenges that are particularly important of critical in that city. Base upon the demographics and subsequent needs of the City of El Paso, it is recommended that recreation programs support the following need areas:

- Youth Development and Successful Adult Transition
- Physical Health and Well-being
- Informal and Lifelong Learning

Those recommendations reflect some specific demographics of the City including:

- El Paso is a city that has a larger percentage of persons under the age of 18 than does the State of Texas or the rest of the country. So the success of young people living in El Paso will play a substantial role in El Paso’s Bright Future.
- Over 70% of households in El Paso are households where a language other than English is spoken; this percentage is far greater than that for the State of Texas or the rest of the United States with percentages of 31% and 18% respectively.



- A relationship between lifetime earnings and education level is fairly well established so it will behoove the City of El Paso to use educational attainment as a strategy for decreasing the percentage of households living below the poverty level.

The United States as a whole is currently challenged with a new phenomenon currently labeled as “successful adult transition.” Society as we know it is being influenced by a growing number of young people who are not able to support themselves financially or emotionally, or take care of a family. This trend, identified by the Annie E. Casey Foundation through its KIDS COUNT tracking system, suggests that there are four million young adults who are “disconnected” and having a tough transition to successful adulthood.

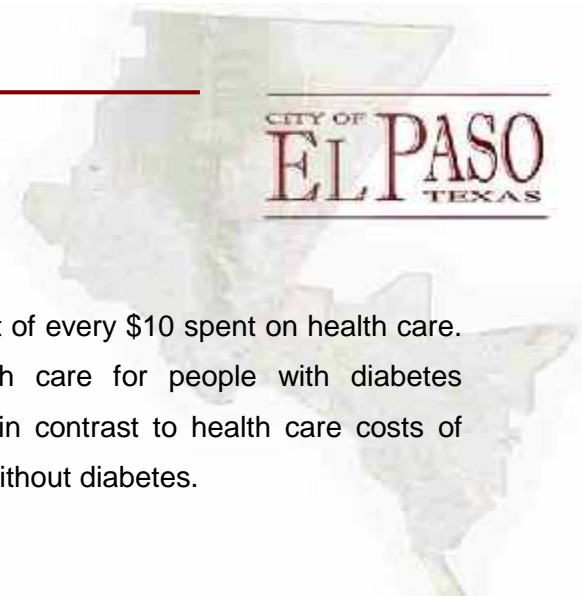
Specific descriptors of this group include:

- One in six young adults ages, 18 through 24, are not working, have no degree beyond high school, and are not enrolled in school
- The percentage of these “disconnected” youth is approximately 15% of the total age group
- Over the past 3 years, there has been a 19% increase; an additional 700,000 youth becoming “disconnected” and facing a tough transition to successful adulthood.
- Most of the disconnected young adults come from poverty backgrounds
- The disconnected young adults are disproportionately of minority backgrounds
- The defining experiences common to many of these young adults include: teens in foster care, teens involved with juvenile justice, teens with children of their own, and teens that did not finish high school.

Over 22% of the people in El Paso live below the poverty line, a substantial percentage of young people in El Paso are within this at risk group.

The economic impact of adults who do not complete high school or those who do not continue their education comes with an economic price to be paid by both the individuals and the communities within which those individual reside. The percentage of adults ages 25 and over with a high school education is 69% of the population in El Paso where percentages of 76% and 80% reflect similar levels in Texas and the United States respectively.

According to government figures, the earning power of individuals with less than a high school education (and even of high school graduates) has fallen continually over the last several decades. In 1971, male dropouts working full-time earned \$35,087 (in 2002 dollars). By 2002, this figure had fallen 35 percent, to \$23,903.



While the aforementioned statistics reflect the values and risks associated with lack of education and success for our youth and some of the economic impacts related to those risks, there is an additional economic factor that also relates to the focus of recreation programs and services in El Paso: health and well-being of its residents.

- Recent projections from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services projected that within a decade it is likely that \$1 out of every \$5 spent in the United States would go for health care pushing the total spending on health care from its current \$16.2% to 20% of the economy by 2016.
- Obesity, particularly among young people, is at near epidemic levels in the United States and that obesity is likely to become a significant threat to both quality of life and economic funding in communities. The Centers for Disease Control indicate that One of every 3 children born in the United States in 2000 will develop diabetes in his or her lifetime. The rate is higher for African-American and Hispanic babies who have a 50% chance of developing diabetes in his or her lifetime.

The quality of life erodes due to loss of limbs, blindness, kidney failure, are only one part of this picture. According to additional information from the Centers for Disease Control, the estimated cost for treating diabetes in 2002 was \$132 billion; that is the

equivalent of \$1 out of every \$10 spent on health care. The cost of health care for people with diabetes averaged \$13,243 in contrast to health care costs of \$2,560 for people without diabetes.

Lack of leisure-time physical activity and improper nutritional knowledge and habits are related to the increase in obesity and subsequent onset of diabetes.

V. Range of Recreation Services

While there are a variety of programs and services provided by the department as well as opportunities afforded the citizens of El Paso, such programs and services are scheduled and delivered in a manner that fails to address the benefits accrued to the community, the individual, or both by the programs and services. It is common practice to develop and deliver programs based upon “the greater good” of a community. Keeping the principle of the “greater good” in mind, park and recreation offerings can be segmented into the following four categories:

- Public Access: areas, facilities, and open space acquired by tax dollars result in less restrictive access to such physical resources.



- **Core Services** Those activities, services, and/or programs that address issues of importance to the current and future viability and well-being of the community
- **Quality of Life Services:** Activities, services, and programs that enhance the overall well-being and quality of life of the individuals involved and/or participating in the specific activity
- **Highly Specialized/Individualized:** Activities, services, and programs that represent one-on-one or small group involvement in highly advanced or specialized nature of a recreation or leisure activity or the restricted use by a particular group of a public area or facility.

Using this “greater community good” philosophy as a basis, well-maintained and safe parks, fields, trails, and community centers that are accessible to citizens during regular usage hours would constitute public access. Swim lessons for children as well as recreational physical activity for youth would be offered as part of instructional and recreational services, those activities that address individual health and the overall well-being of the community. Programs such as competitive leagues and self-improvement classes are just a few examples of programs falling within the quality of life category. Any use of facilities or areas restricted to a pre-determined group such as facility rentals or competitive sports leagues would fall into the last category as would highly

specialized and/or individualized programming such as use of a personal trainer or scuba diving lessons.

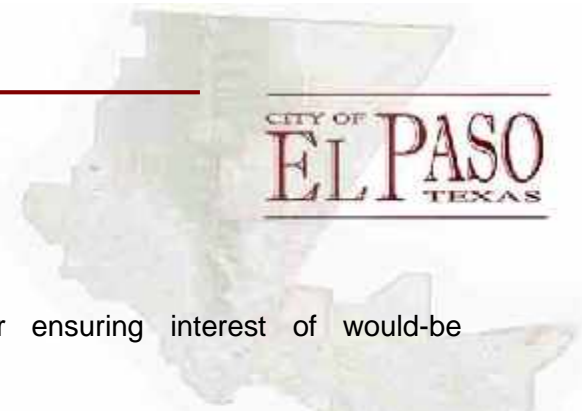
The categorization and identification of all programs and services offered as recreation in this manner would significantly support the development and enforcement of programming policies including such areas as priority of usage and pricing for programs.

Using a recognized programming approach consisting of needs assessment, objectives, construction, delivery, and evaluation, begin by identifying the important and critical needs for various segments of the population based upon age and geography and move the process forward from there (See Staff Development reference cited later in this section).

VI. Programming Pricing

The pricing issue related to recreation programming in this department is primarily based upon revenue generation with attention not being given to pricing alternatives and policies. The types of questions most often being asked include who we charge, what programs we charge for, and how do we determine prices for various levels and types of services. Currently, there is not a framework for establishing pricing policies for various levels and types of programming. Fees and charges are often assessed to department’s programs and facilities by other department programs and facilities.

Benefits-Based Programming Continuum			
Public Access to Public Facilities	Core Services - Community Issues	Quality of Life within the Community	Highly Specialized and Individualized
Examples:			
Parks, Athletic Fields, and Centers that are safe and accessible	Swim Lessons	Swim Team	Scuba Diving
	Recreational and Physical Activity	Adult Art Classes	Facility Rentals
	After-school and Summer Programs		
	Instructional Recreational Leagues	Competitive NFP league	Independent Leagues



Many programming decisions and choices appear to be made on the basis of revenue that can be generated. The culture of this department as it relates to determining which programs are to be offered and the pricing of those programs has primarily been determined and driven by those programs and services that can generate the most revenue for the department.

Revenue generation is an accepted and expected role of public parks and recreation departments throughout the country, but those pricing and programming decisions are based upon the various categories of services being offered within a community.

How then do departments assign a fee or charge to various programs and services?

There are a number of pricing practices that can be used for this purpose including:

- **Market-driven Pricing:** establishing a fee for a program or service based upon what the market will bear and/or the demand for a particular program or service
- **Cost-recovery Pricing:** establishing fees upon the basis of the percentage of program or service costs that the departments deems appropriate to recover; could vary from 0 to 100%+.
- **Symbolic Pricing:** relatively low fees assessed to programs as a mechanism for either accounting for

participation levels or ensuring interest of would-be participants.

- **Entrepreneurial Pricing:** establishing fees that cover all direct, indirect, and associated costs of the program or service and generate revenue above and beyond costs that can be used for other purposes, i.e. underwriting the cost of other programs or services, paying for the major renovations of the facility generating the revenue, etc.
- **Benefit-based Pricing:** fees and charges for programs and services based on the extent of public vs. private benefits; this approach could accommodate programs, facilities, and services that support and serve the overall community viability and well being as well as those services that provide highly specialized, individual derived benefits to the participants.

As mentioned earlier there are a variety of pricing methodologies being used within the department. Examples include:

- Specific programs are offered or not offered based solely upon the willingness of people to pay for the program; classes held at the centers would reflect this marketing-driven approach.
- For some youth and senior citizen programming there is a minimal fee being assessed for programs reflecting symbolic payment pricing.



- Cost recovery pricing is being used when the aquatic division within the department charges other departmental program for use of its facilities
- At this juncture, the department does not treat field or facility rentals by a specific group as a highly specialized or individualized service that could fall within the profit generation approach:

It is being strongly recommended that the Department assume a benefits-based pricing strategy that would be addressed in two steps.

1. Each program, facility, or service offered by the department is reviewed to determine its place along the benefit-based pricing continuum.
2. The Department creates a policy that determines types of costs related to each benefit category ranging from covering cost to full cost recovery plus additional revenues.

Benefit-Based Pricing Possibilities	
Public Access	No Fee (based upon limited amenities or Cost of collecting and accounting for fee)
	Symbolic Pricing (small fee charged)
Core Services	Symbolic Pricing (small fee charged) Partial Cost Recovery
Quality of Life	Cost Recovery or Market Driven
Highly Specialized/ Highly Individualized	Market Driven Entrepreneurial